

Summary: The New Orleans Conference on Agricultural Dusts—1984: Cotton and Grain Dusts

by Ralph J. Berni*

The papers contained in this issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives* were presented at a conference sponsored by Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Department of Environmental Health Sciences and further supported by two cooperating organizations: Southern Regional Research Center, Agricultural Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture and the Appalachian Laboratory for Occupational Safety and Health, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. This inaugural conference was held in New Orleans, LA, November 1 and 2, 1984. Thomas G. Akers (Tulane Univ.) reiterated the purposes of the conference; namely, to discuss current research on agricultural dusts, including epidemiological as well as clinical aspects; to make recommendations on future thrusts that will promote and enhance scientific interactions in the Greater New Orleans area and throughout the United States; and to highlight local, available expertise and facilities for research in this important occupational health area. The conference was successful in all these areas, promoting interactions among representatives from universities, government and industry.

Edgar L. Kendrick (USDA) discussed the improving opportunities for public and private sector collaboration in the solution of agriculture's highest priority problems among which are those associated with cotton and grain dusts. Jane Robens (ARS, USDA) discussed ARS's continuing commitment to assure the safety of agricultural

production through active research programs.

Bernard Gee (Yale Univ.) discussed potential inflammatory mechanisms of airway alterations resulting from cotton or grain dust exposure. He indicated a need for further research in these areas with emphasis on clinical observations and epidemiological inquiry. All of the papers and posters that followed supported his recommendations for further research.

The most important phrase repeated throughout the conference was cooperative research: cooperation between individual scientists working in cotton and grain dust research—and more importantly—cooperation between organizations such as those that formed this meeting; namely, Tulane University, Southern Regional Research Center, and NIOSH.

The value of continued research was stressed by all of the speakers; the need for more clinical observations to combine with long-term epidemiologic studies was stressed time and time again. The complications of smoking in both respiratory ailments connected with grain dust and with byssinosis were pointed out by many of the participants. The poster session gave the conference attendees a chance to converse, one on one, with researchers about very recent work. The engineering problems and possible solutions to obtaining valuable respirable dust (to be used in research to find the mechanism of lung diseases) more efficiently added to the success of the conference.

This conference, having met all of its planned objectives, adjourned with the hope that all of the attendees would continue to interact to solve problems in this important occupational health area.

*Industrial Environmental Health Unit, Southern Regional Research Center, P. O. Box 19687, New Orleans, LA 70179.